

Message Text

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PAGE 01 KATHMA 02301 020701Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 HA-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05
H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02
SS-15 OMB-01 /071 W
-----127759 020708Z /14

R 020525Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1892
INFO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
USICA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L KATHMANDU 2301

USICA FOR NEA

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PERP, PINS, SHUM, NP, UR
SUBJECT: SOVIET BACKED NEWSPAPER CLOSED

REF: 77 KATHMANDU 4326

1. LOCAL NEPALI LANGUAGE NEWSPAPER, SAMIKSHA, WAS BANNED
APRIL 25 BY GOVERNMENT OF NEPAL. NO REASON WAS GIVEN FOR
ACTION BUT INFO FROM VARIETY OF EMBASSY SOURCES INDICATES
DECISION BASED ON CARTOON CARRIED IN SAMIKSHA ISSUE OF APRIL 21
IMPLICITLY CRITICIZING KING AS BEING SLOW WITTED. WHILE PRESS
CRITICISM OF GOVERNMENT IS PERMITTED (AND INDULGED IN FREELY
IF NOT ALWAYS RESPONSIBLY)- UNDER PROVISIONS OF PRESS &
PUBLICATIONS ACT, GOING BACK TO 1952, CRITICISM
OF KING AND ROYAL FAMILY IS
FORBIDDEN. CARTOON DRAWS ON INDIAN HISTORY/FOLKLORE WHICH ABOUNDS
IN STORIES IN WHICH HINDU PRIME MINISTER BIRBAL USES QUICK WITS TO
UPSTAGE MUSLIM KING, AKHBAR. CARTOON IN SAMIKSHA SHOWS KING
ASKING HIS PRIME MINISTER (CALLED BIRBAL IN CAPTION
BUT LABELED BISTA) WHAT HE IS DOING AS HE
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WASHES DONKEY IN STREAM. BIRBAL/BISTA RESPONDS THAT HE IS
WASHING DONKEYS (LABELED "CABINET") "TO TURN THEM
INTO HORSES, YOUR MAJESTY." MESSAGE CLEARLY RELATED TO
REPORTS OF CORRUPTION INVOLVING SEVERAL CABINET MINISTERS
AND CONTINUING RUMORS OF IMPENDING CABINET RESHUFFLE.

2. SAMIKSHA, WHICH IS DIRECTLY SUPPORTED BY USSR EMBASSY AND

IS REGULAR PROPAGANDA ORGAN FOR SOVIET POINT OF VIEW, IS ONE OF NEWSPAPERS ON WHICH BAN WAS LIFTED IN OCTOBER 1977.

3. REACTION IN KATHMANDU TO THIS ACTION IS MIXED. ON ONE HAND, NUMBER OF LOCAL OBSERVERS SHED FEW TEARS AT DISAPPEARANCE OF THIS SOVIET TOOL. LAST ISSUE, FOR EXAMPLE, ACCUSED MORARJI DESAI OF BACKING CIA IN NANDA DEVI INCIDENT IN ORDER SCORE POLITICAL POINTS DOMESTICALLY IN INDIA, AND CHARGED PRC LIKEWISE OF DISPLAYING "SOLIDARITY...WITH AGGRESSIVE IMPERIALISM AND THE SUBVERSIVE CIA" IN ATTACKING THE SOVIET UNION. THIS SORT OF EDITORIAL LINE COUPLED WITH STRONG CRITICISM OF BISTA GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN CONSISTENT PATTERN FOR SAMIKSHA OVER LAST SIX MONTHS. OTHERS, HOWEVER, HAVE CRITICIZED BANNING REGARDLESS OF PROVOCATION, AS RESTRICTION OF PRESS FREEDOM.

4. COMMENT: WE SEE BANNING OF SAMIKSHA AS ISOLATED ACT, PROVOKED BY ITS SAILING TOO CLOSE TO THE WIND IN CRITICIZING PERSON OF KING, RATHER THAN AS PRECURSOR OF SWING BACK TOWARDS MORE CONTROLLED PRESS. PRESS CRITICISM OF GOVERNMENT (AS DISTINCT FROM KING) IS NOT ONLY PERMITTED BUT FREQUENTLY ENGAGED IN IN SPIRITED MANNER. EAVES

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